

Wesley Theological Seminary
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DM-A604 Holy Spaces: Architecture of the Western Church

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Arts and Theology Track

Winston Churchill once said, “We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us.” Of all possible building types, the places where we gather to worship God probably best exemplify the truth of this statement. Yet surprisingly, too many clergy and congregational leaders pay little heed to the notion that their worship space has any impact on the life of the congregation, or choose to abdicate the responsibility for its shape to architects and engineers, both of which are shortsighted and miss a tremendous opportunity to engage the congregation in an intentional spiritual experience.

The design of our churches can say a great deal about who we believe God to be, who we are as followers of Christ, how we practice our corporate worship, how hospitable we are to visitors and what our mission is to the world. The stories our churches tell not only teach, but also persuade and motivate a response. At times, they unfortunately can offend and repel. The architecture of our churches speaks loudly on our behalf and as a result, we are responsible to know what is being said. Yet, do we really know? Are we comfortable with the messages our churches are conveying? Ultimately, what can we do to shape our buildings, so they, in turn, can shape our congregations to be inspired, faithful children of God?

This course will explore the roots of western Christian architecture, the fundamental concepts which shape the spaces in which we worship, and help students better understand the inherent language and complex layers of meaning found in our churches. In the end, students will be able to effectively articulate and share this silent language of faith with others in their communities.

Pre-Course Assignments:

The following texts are required reading. Please read before the beginning of class:

- *Sacred Power, Sacred Space: An Introduction to Christian Architecture and Worship*, by Jeanne Halgren Kilde. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. ISBN 978-0-19-533606-1
- *Searching for Sacred Space: Essays on Architecture and Liturgical Design in the Episcopal Church*, by John Ander Runkle, ed. New York: Church Publishing Inc., 2002. ISBN 978-0-8986-9371-3
- *How to Read Churches: A Crash Course in Ecclesiastical Architecture*, by Denis R. McNamara. New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2011. ISBN 978-0-8478-3598-0

The following texts are recommended reading. It will be very helpful to read them before class:

- *An Architecture of Immanence: Architecture for Worship and Ministry Today*, by Mark A. Torgerson. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2007. ISBN 978-0-8028-3209-2
- *The Gothic Enterprise: A Guide to Understanding the Medieval Cathedral*, by Robert A. Scott. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2003. ISBN 978-0-5202-6999-6
- *The Geometry of Love: Space, Time, Mystery and Meaning in an Ordinary Church*, by Margaret Visser. New York: North Point Press, 2000. ISBN 978-0-8654-7640-0

Last, but not least!

Prior to the first day of class, prepare a written reflection – no more than one-page in length – on the following topic: “What does sacred space mean to me?”